



## OVERVIEW

### California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care

Nearly 80,000 children live in foster care in California, removed from their parents for reasons of abuse or neglect. For these children, the State of California in effect functions as their “parent” and is legally responsible for their safety, permanency, and well-being. Courts, child welfare and other government agencies share responsibility for these youth, all of whom deserve a permanent family and a system that deals with them fairly.

#### The Need for Court Reform

In California, every child who enters or leaves foster care must come before a dependency court judge. Courts and the legal process oversee critical and often life-changing decisions in that child’s life. Yet judges and lawyers face numerous obstacles in a system that does not always receive adequate support to allow for the best decisions for children and families. For example:

- Courts are understaffed and dockets are overcrowded. As a result, hearings may be rushed and courts may have only a matter of minutes to consider key decisions that impact children and families. Delays and continuances occur too often.
- Every child is assigned legal counsel, but due to high caseloads children and parents may not be routinely involved in decisions that affect them. Foster youth sometimes do not meet their attorneys until the day of their hearing.
- Communication and information sharing with child welfare and other agencies working with families is challenging. Judges sometimes do not receive adequate information to make informed decisions.

#### Doing Better By California’s Children in Foster Care

In 2006, Chief Justice Ronald M. George appointed a high-level Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care to provide recommendations on how courts and their partners can improve child welfare and fairness outcomes. Chaired by Justice Carlos R. Moreno, the commission is charged with developing recommendations and an implementation plan covering three main areas. Areas of focus include:

- **Improved Court Performance and Accountability**
  - ✓ Manageable caseloads, allowing sufficient time for more substantive hearings.
  - ✓ Greater involvement of youth and families in decisions that affect their lives.
  - ✓ More training for judges and attorneys.
  - ✓ Better measures of progress around safety, permanency, well-being, and fairness.
- **Improved Collaboration among Agencies that Work with Families**
  - ✓ Streamlined communication and enhanced information-sharing between courts, child welfare, and other relevant agencies, including education, public health, mental health, and juvenile justice.
- **The Need for Adequate and Flexible Funding**
  - ✓ Flexible use of funds so that money can be used to support the services that families need when they need them.
  - ✓ More funds for preventive services to help parents keep children in the home safely.

The Blue Ribbon Commission presents its recommendations to the Judicial Council on August 15, 2008. To learn more, visit [www.courtinfo.ca.gov/blueribbon](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/blueribbon).